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NORTH AMERICAN TRAINING RESOURCES THAT SHOULD BE MORE WIDELY USED IN THE
PREPARATION OF MISSIONARIES AND NATIONALS FOR RURAL WORK

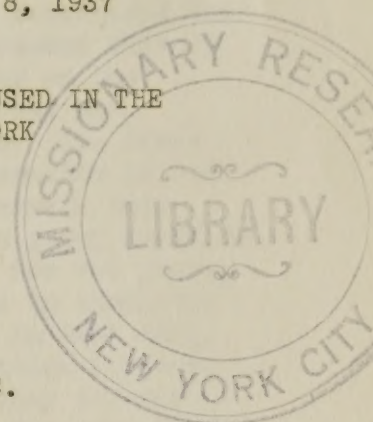
8. HOME ECONOMICS AND HOME DEMONSTRATION WORK

by

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In a sense I am here under false pretenses. I was delighted to be invited, thinking that I was coming to get something rather than to try to give something. I am here because I am secretary of the international committee of the American Home Economics Association, one of whose interests is, with very modest means, to bring to this country a few young women who give promise of leadership in their own country and who would like to come here to learn a little of our methods for teaching homemaking. We do not bring them because we think they can go home and apply our methods but because we believe that certain fundamental principles of education for home and family life are common to all countries and because in this country a special combination of circumstances has developed that education more highly than in most other places.

I am not an extension worker at all. I probably know less about home demonstration work than many of you. In fact, when I saw my name and subject on the program, I was reminded of the volume of Jane Austen's school-girl writings which was gotten out a few years ago for the delight of true Janeites. The title of one of these youthful masterpieces reads: "The History of England, from the Reign of Henry VI to the Death of Charles I, by a Partial, Prejudiced, and Ignorant Historian." As an historian of home demonstration work I fear that I am partial, prejudiced, and ignorant.

However, I can at least remind you that this question of home training for rural women came to the fore soon after the land-grant colleges, about which we have just been hearing, were established. At that time, there was a feeling in favor of equal educational opportunities for women and men; and so when the agricultural colleges were established, there frequently came to be attached to them a department that was supposed to do for the women in the farm home what the agricultural department did for the men on the farm. This department dwelt mainly on home production, in the early days. As our economic situation has changed and as so much production has gone out of the home, even the rural home, emphasis has tended to shift from the home production of food and clothing to the better selection of food and clothing. Also, another thing has come in, not so clearly realized at that time, namely, the importance in all education of what we speak of as the development of the personality of the individual. There is no department that lends itself better to this "integrated" education than the home economics department, because it deals with subject matter that is of vital concern to every child in the school and to every man and woman in the higher grades in education.

Like Doctor Jones, I spent part of my time yesterday afternoon and evening mentally wording my speech for this morning. I am indebted to him for a grand spring-board. He talked about "the vindication of the obvious." This applies beautifully to the history of home economics. It is certainly obvious that the home is the center of personality development and that personality determines the quality of home and community life. Whereas in the past we have assumed that it was possible through traditional mother-to-daughter teaching to pass on the existing home skills and traditions and have thought this was all that was necessary, in the last few decades we have learned that is not true. The land-grant colleges have taken the lead in the development of higher education in home economics. They--and the home economists in the lower schools too--were very fortunate in the beginning to have the benefit of the thinking of a group known as the Lake Placid Conference. That was a group who met each summer for ten years, (1899 to 1908) at Lake Placid Club, and in informal discussions and in committee work between conferences tried to formulate what was really needed in what they saw as an important but neglected field of education, namely, education for home-making. They were a very broadminded group of men and women, and they foresaw practically all the main lines of the development in the education for homemaking as we see it today. The rank and file of us have perhaps not yet caught up with them. Their findings have been and are a mine of philosophy and fact regarding this subject of education for homemaking.

Along with the development of the teaching of this subject in the colleges came the development of agricultural extension work; and in that, of course, provision had to be made for extension work with the women as well as with the men and with the girls as well as with the boys. The name chosen for the work with women was "home demonstration work." It was based on the principle that you "learn by doing,"--that if you demonstrate the thing you are trying to teach, the person who is trying to learn will see and understand better than by merely reading or hearing about it, and better still if he has a chance to take part in it, to demonstrate it himself. So they developed a method of demonstrating home practices in which the women were interested. Along with that, they developed several other principles that are of great educational interest. One is the development of leadership--as far as possible getting the women themselves to be trained as leaders for the smaller groups.

A second principle is, as I understand it, that no project is undertaken without a request from the people who are going to carry out that project. That means that all the work done in the extension service, certainly in the home demonstration service, is done at the request of the people who are to take part.

I do not know how familiar you are with what we think of in these days as the content of home economics. Perhaps it will be worth while to run over the subjects into which we now analyze it:

1. Personnel of the family--family relationships
2. Family economics--the utilization the family makes of all its resources, whether of money, of time and energy, of personal abilities
3. The house, its equipment and management
4. Textiles and clothing
5. Foods and nutrition

In connection with the work in which most of you are vitally interested, the first two and the last of these are perhaps of most significance. I am not going to take up the first because Miss White will talk of family relationships.

The second, family economics, is particularly important in rural life. One of the most gratifying things to us in the recent rural rehabilitation program which has been attempted in the United States since 1933 is to see how the economic problems of the farm home have been brought to the fore. When loans are made to farm families, not only the farm management specialist but also the home management specialist goes over the situation and helps to determine what is the best plan for rehabilitating that family, economically, socially, personally. That is the thing that we would like to see everywhere. Unfortunately, we do not see it in all fields of home economics. You will readily agree that such plans for using the family resources would be of great help in the general rehabilitation of a family in any circumstances; and where family business and the home are as closely integrated as they are in rural life everywhere, it is of even more importance.

The last home economics subject, nutrition, is the most fully developed. More information is available about this than about the others. This fact, too, is tied up with the history of the land-grant colleges and agricultural experiment stations in the United States. In the early days, there was a special nutrition investigation under the United States Department of Agriculture which encouraged the experiment stations to study the nutritive values of the foods grown and the dietary habits of the people in the different states, so that all together they would present as complete a picture as possible. Also, in the United States Department of Agriculture, the nutrition workers were among the first to tackle the problem of popularizing scientific findings. If you have never tried to popularize scientific data, you have no idea how difficult the process is. One of the reasons why we were able in this country to do such good work in the Food Conservation Campaign during the war was because we had already begun to learn about popularizing information on food and nutrition and methods of teaching it through our home demonstration work. Just now nutrition is of particular significance to a group like yours because of the work which, at the suggestion of the League of Nations, governments and private organizations are doing with popular nutrition in a great many different countries. One of the fellows whom the American Home Economics Association has brought to this country this year is a Swedish girl who is here because she wants to study our methods and materials and then go back to Sweden to help popularize knowledge of food values in her country. The chances are that more and more you will find that you need workers who know what nutrition really means. If they have that knowledge, they will be better able to enter into the community programs and dovetail their own efforts into the work of the governments.

All this, in a sense, is obvious, yet evidently it will still stand a little vindication. I so often think in this connection of what is happening in connection with housing. We are becoming housing conscious in this country. Everyone concedes that the aim of improved housing is to get a higher standard of living, especially for our low-income groups. Yet if you go to a conference on housing, you will find the real-estate people presenting the subject only from the point of view of land development; the bankers talking only from the point of view of finance; the architects, from the point of view of design; the contractors, from the point of view of labor and materials; the political economists from the point of view of taxation; the social workers, from the point of view of assistance; and somehow, unless one of our home economists gets up and calls attention to the fact that what they are supposedly trying to do is provide houses which will be a proper setting for satisfactory individual development and family life, that central fact is left out of the picture.

I do not know if what I have said will make you realize why this point of view seems so important in educational efforts such as this conference has been discussing. To us it seems obvious that if you really want to develop better personalities, better relationships within the family, and better relations between the family and the community, you would do well to have more people on your staff who have been trained to analyze the actual problems of home and family life.